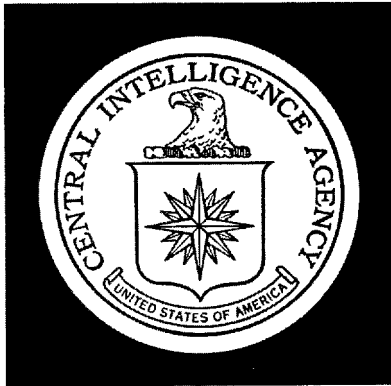


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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12 May 1967

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Information as of 1600
12 May 1967

HIGHLIGHTS

Premier Ky has publicly announced his candidacy for the presidency. The Constituent Assembly has completed debate on the draft presidential election law, and a final vote of approval--barring further complications--is scheduled for 12 May.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The US heavy artillery position at Gio Linh in northern Quang Tri Province was attacked again on 12 May by enemy artillery and mortars (Para. 1). Two US airfields near Saigon were hit by rocket and mortar fire early on 12 May (Paras. 2-3). Further reports of Communist plans to attack Quang Tri city in the near future state that additional enemy units have been deployed to the area near the city (Paras. 4-5).

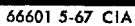
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Premier Ky today formally announced his intention to become a candidate for the presidency (Paras. 1-5). The Constituent Assembly has completed debate on the presidential electoral law and is preparing to take a final vote of approval (Paras. 6-7).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: North Vietnam's fighter defense capability is being maintained (Paras. 1-4). A US aircraft was downed by a MIG (Para. 5). [redacted] the presence of Chinese observers in South Vietnam (Paras. 6-9).

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V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnamese artillery and mortars shelled the forward American artillery post at Gio Linh in northeastern Quang Tri Province again on 12 May. Ten Americans were wounded during the attack. Nearly 100 rounds of enemy fire were directed at the US installation--one of the two sites immediately south of the DMZ where the 175-mm. artillery pieces are positioned.

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Viet Cong Attack Airfields Near Saigon

2. The Communists staged attacks against two airfields near Saigon early on 12 May. The Bien Hoa Air Base, 16 miles northeast of the capital, was struck by 125 rounds of 140-mm. rocket, 60-mm. mortar, and 57-mm. recoilless rifle fire during a 15-minute barrage which resulted in American and South Vietnamese casualties of ten killed and 74 wounded. In addition, three aircraft were destroyed and 42 damaged. This is the first reported use of the Soviet 140-mm. barrage-type rocket in South Vietnam's III Corps, although previous intelligence reports have suggested that rockets would soon be used against allied targets in the Saigon area. This was the first large-scale attack against the Bien Hoa base since August 1965.

3. About an hour later, the Viet Cong fired approximately 40 rounds of mortar fire at the Phuoc Vinh airstrip, 18 miles north of Binh Hoa in Binh Duong Province. A total of 27 Americans were wounded during the 20-minute attack which also resulted in one helicopter destroyed, nine others damaged, and five barracks damaged.

Additional Reports of Enemy Plans to Attack Quang Tri City

4. Two enemy regiments have moved into an area southwest of Quang Tri city with orders to attack the

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provincial capital prior to the 23 May Buddha's birthday holiday, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reports have indicated previously that enemy forces were moving from Laos into this general area. A prisoner taken during the recent battle near Khe Sanh stated that his regiment was scheduled to attack Quang Tri city in June.

5. The alleged enemy plans to hit Quang Tri city prior to 23 May could reflect hopes that the withdrawal of Communist attacking units would be facilitated by the holiday cease-fire. The Communists have stated that they will observe a two-day cease-fire beginning on 22 May in honor of Buddha's birthday, and allied forces have agreed to stop operations on the 23rd.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. At a press conference in Da Lat today, Premier Ky formally announced that he would become a candidate for the presidency. Ky indicated that he had informed Chief of State Thieu and the Directorate of his decision to run. Ky told the press that he had decided to become a candidate at the urging of "many members of the armed forces" who wanted him to continue in the role of leadership that he assumed two years ago.

2. In response to questions by reporters, Ky said that he did not believe there would be two military candidates, but that if General Thieu--his principal rival for the presidential candidacy within the military--chose to run, he was free to do so "like any other citizen." Ky added, in answer to another question, that he would "possibly withdraw" from the race if Thieu were to announce his own candidacy before the deadline for filing is reached on 5 July.

3. Following Ky's announcement, a spokesman for General Thieu quoted Thieu as declaring that Premier Ky was free as an individual to run for president, and that Ky's decision was in accordance with the recent stand, announced by the chief of the General Staff, General Cao Van Vien, that the armed forces as a body could not support any candidate for president. The spokesman also declared that Thieu may still run for the presidency. Thieu, as late as yesterday, had indicated in the press that he was not yet in a position to decide whether or not to run for president.

4. Ky also used the Da Lat press conference to scotch rumors that have been circulating in Saigon about the possibility of the early return of exiled generals Duong Van Minh, ousted by the Khanh government, and Nguyen Chanh Thi, ousted during the Buddhist "struggle" movement last spring. With regard to a rumor that Minh would run for office, Ky said that

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Minh is tired of politics and only interested in retirement. As for the rumor that Thi was returning to his former I Corps command, Ky insisted that this was unfounded.

5. The statements of both Ky and Thieu are inconclusive, and leave both men considerable room to maneuver before the deadline for filing. On balance, however, it seems unlikely that Ky will remove himself from the race now that he has publicly committed himself, even if Thieu does decide to become a candidate. Thieu's ultimate intentions remain obscure.

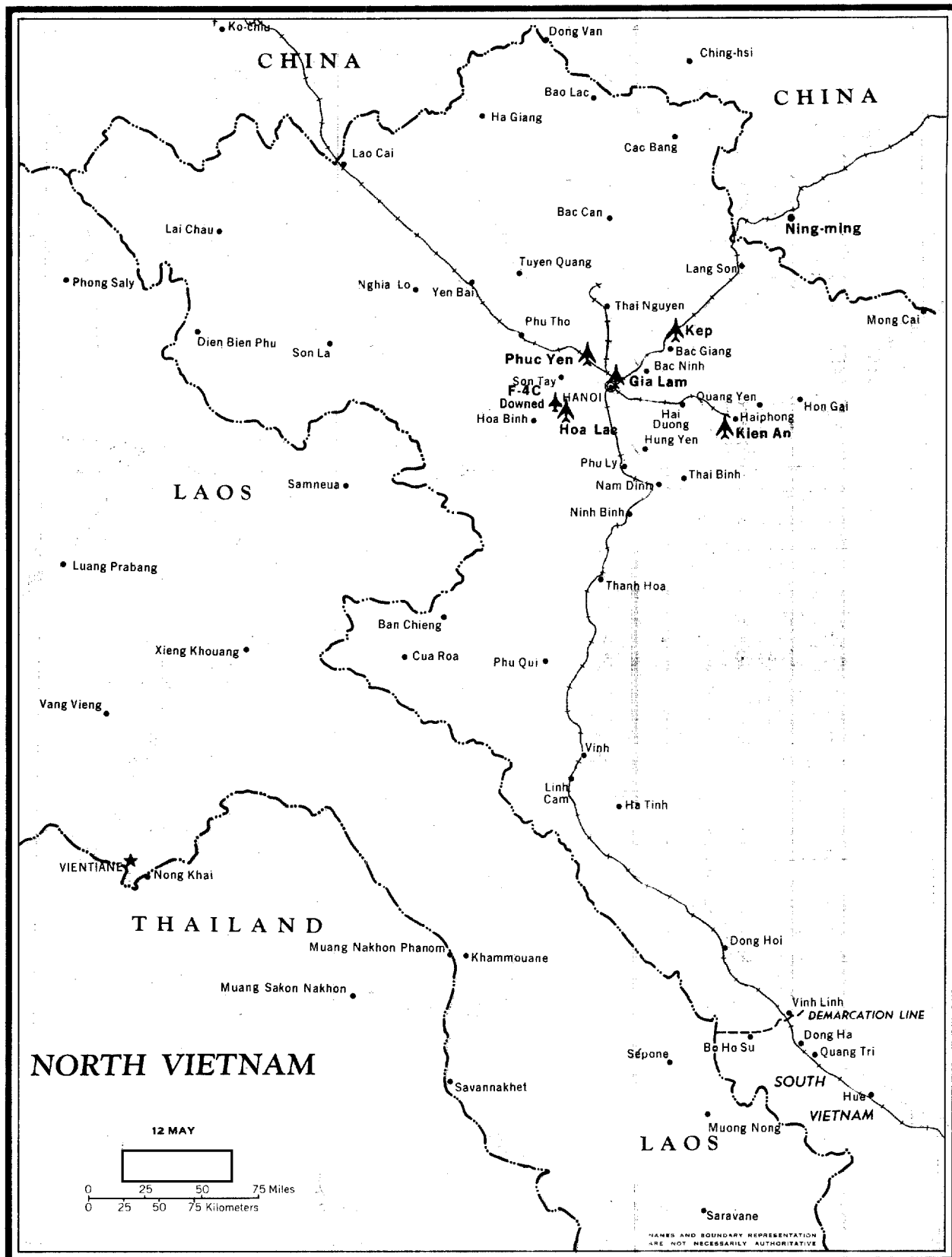
Constituent Assembly Activities

6. On 10 May, the Constituent Assembly completed debate on the draft presidential electoral law. Final action, consisting of a review of the amended law by the assembly and a vote of approval, is scheduled for 12 May. There may be some delay, however, before the final approval is given by the assembly. The way has been left open for further debate to take place on the one remaining controversial article, which requires that the winning candidate simply get more votes than any of his competitors. Opponents of this article may be expected to make a last-ditch effort to change it so as to include provisions that the winner must attain a minimum percentage of the total vote and that a runoff election must be held if no candidate reaches the minimum.

7. In the last session of the assembly, the electoral law was expanded by 14 articles, the most extensive change in the draft law since it came before the assembly. The new provisions focus on the matter of election fraud and deal mainly with penalties for tampering with the election process, coercing voting officials and electors, malfeasance by officials, and other related irregularities.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnam's fighter defense capability is being maintained and improved despite substantial MIG losses and the bombing of three of its five jet airfields. [REDACTED] indicate that the North Vietnamese have received aircraft to replace their losses.

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2. Since 1 January 1967 US planes have shot down more than 20 North Vietnamese MIGs, but current DRV fighter strength is substantially the same as it was at the first of the year. More than half of North Vietnam's 1967 fighter losses have been MIG-21 aircraft and yet the MIG-21 inventory has advanced from 15 to 24 planes during the past four months. The piecemeal US raids on Kep, Hoa Lac and Kien An airfields have probably complicated North Vietnam's aircraft deployment arrangements, but US pilots have reported no reduction in the number or aggressiveness of the MIGs opposing their bombing missions.

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US Aircraft Shot Down by MIG

5. An Air Force F4C fighter flying a MIG combat air patrol mission some 20 miles west-southwest of Hanoi was shot down by gunfire from a DRV MIG-17 on 12 May. Both pilots were seen to land in the vicinity of the shoot-down but no information is available on search and rescue attempts. North Vietnamese fighters have downed 23 US aircraft while losing 57 of their own aircraft in aerial engagements.

Chinese Observers in South Vietnam

6. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] who defected to allied forces in March, has stated under interrogation that he knew of four groups of Chinese observers who visited Military Region 5 between October 1964 and February 1966. In addition, he was aware of two other groups of Chinese photographers and cameramen who visited and traveled throughout MR 5 in 1964 and 1965.

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8. [REDACTED] these personnel were always referred to as "Chinese" rather than "Chinese Communists" and that they were never called advisers. [REDACTED] a person designated as an adviser had control over the people he was advising. He thought the Chinese had three reasons for coming to South Vietnam: to determine how they could assist the VC, to obtain information on tactics and techniques used by US forces, and to study the development of guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam.

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9. There have been occasional reports from other prisoners and returnees about the presence of Chinese Communist personnel in South Vietnam. In most cases their reported presence as military advisers to Viet Cong units has been rather vague. It is more likely, [redacted] that most of the Chinese personnel who have been in South Vietnam have been there as observers.

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